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STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909

**Testimony of John Austin, President, Michigan State Board of Education
on HJR GG to House Committee on Elections and Ethics Committee**

June 4, 2014

I am John Austin, President of the State Board of Education. I appreciate the interest in the important topic of how we ensure the voice of our citizens is represented in government, on the State Board of Education, and in all matters. As the Committee is aware, our Michigan Constitution is unique in that its architects, including future Governor George Romney, created an independent State Board of Education, elected statewide to give it political standing and granted long eight-year terms to protect it from day to day political concerns so it could take the long view; do what's best for education; and do so, as we do, in a strong bi-partisan manner.

There is a different discussion about whether a Governor-appointed Board or our independent elected Board is best to provide accountability and good education policy. The resolution you are considering today is purportedly about ensuring geographical diversity. Regional and geographic representation is important, and we welcome that on the Board. But I am concerned that this legislation would end up over-representing more rural areas of the state, and serve as a form of gerrymandering making the State Board more Republican, and less diverse, than the whole of the state.

I would remind the Committee that there are lots of forms of diversity we value and would hope to see represented on the Board and in all elected bodies; rural, urban, geographic, white, black, Latino, Arabic, gay, straight. I would caution the Committee about recommending changing the Constitution to enshrine and favor one form of diversity over the many forms of diversity we would like to see represented on the Board.

For these reasons, I oppose this legislation, and suggest we continue to let all the people of Michigan determine their representation.